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City of Salisbury Mayor's Spirit Luncheon Offers Inspirational Message of Race Relations, Commitment and Community Involvement

"Diversity in Relationships Enhances Safe Communities"

Salisbury, NC – March 29, 2006 – Salisbury Mayor Susan Kluttz, in conjunction with the City Council Members and the Covenant Community Connection, graciously welcomed attendees to the 2006 Mayor's Spirit Luncheon, held Tuesday, March 28, 2006, at Salisbury City Hall. The bi-annual event highlights successes within the community which have improved race relations. A diverse audience, consisting of local businessmen and women, faith leaders and citizens, received a motivational program as they enjoyed port-a-pit barbecue chicken dinners, purchased in support of the annual Habit for Humanity fundraising project.

Following the welcome, Mayor Kluttz introduced local clergy and faith leaders, Mitchell Siegel, Reverend Fleming Otey, and Hassan Mohammad, whom each in-turn, offered the invocation through blessings, prayers and words of praise. Kluttz added that the varied invocations were symbolic of the multitude of religions and beliefs present in the Salisbury Community. In addition, the Mayor shared that the colorful balloon bouquets, present on each table, offered colors symbolic of the flags of the fifteen nationalities represented within the City. The Mayor further explained that the purpose of the luncheon, is to encourage and celebrate diversity appreciation in the community and to highlight people and efforts taking place for that cause. Continuing, the Mayor noted that diversity includes all differences, religious as well as racial.

During the introduction of Key Note Speaker, Henry Diggs, Mayor Kluttz enlightened attendees to the various service roles, Diggs has upheld in support of Salisbury Rowan. In the late 90's, Diggs served as chairman of the Human Relations Council. While in this position, he played an important role in assisting the City to provide multiculturalism training to the Salisbury/Rowan Community, through grant funding from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. These dedicated efforts produced a First Place Award for the City of Salisbury at the National League of Cities in 2000. In 2001-2002, Salisbury experienced an excessive number of murders involving illegal gun crime activity. US Attorney for the Middle District of NC, Anna Mills Wagoner, responded to the crisis by offering federal assistance via the Project SAFE Neighborhoods program. Diggs was selected to lead the Project Safe Salisbury community intervention task force. The

Mayor noted that Henry has provided excellent leadership and guidance, while the program has continued to grow steadily over the past 3 years.

Taking the podium, Diggs offered a high energy presentation entitled “Diversity in Relationships Enhances Safe Communities,” and challenged attendees to become a part of RTTC, an acronym for Reflection, Transformation, Trust and Cooperation. “Adjust and commit your involvement to develop a passion for positive change within your community,” Diggs proposed. As those in attendance reviewed Project SAFE Salisbury brochures, Diggs relayed details of the gun violence prevention program. “Over three years, we have notified over 81 folks (violent offenders).” As part of the Project SAFE agenda, violent convicted felons attend a community notification session, where they are informed that they could face federal charges for the crimes which they have committed. The notification includes an opening segment by volunteer community representatives who offer assistance, compassion and sincere concern for the welfare of their community and the future of those notified. Immediately following, law enforcement and prosecutors promise stiff punishment for those who continue to commit violence. Project SAFE is not an offer to forgive, but a way for offenders to turn their lives around. For the offenders who continue to commit acts of violence, police and prosecutors promise that they will come down hard on them in state and federal court and get them off the streets for a long time. Diggs explains, “Those offenders that did not yield to our warnings are serving 20 plus years with an additional 30 years of probation...they were warned by community and law enforcement, but they did not heed.” Highlighting the presentation, Diggs offered audience members, the first glimpse of the new Project SAFE Salisbury video, created by Miller Davis Studios of Salisbury. The video, which portrays diverse races and ages of youth involved in gun crime activity, is to be utilized for gun prevention outreach to local high school students.

Following the presentation, Mayor Kluttz presented Diggs with the key to the City of Salisbury for his tireless dedication to enhancing race relations within Salisbury and his devotion to the Project SAFE mission. In addition, Project SAFE Salisbury, Hispanic Coalition, Salisbury-Rowan Human Relations Council and Covenant Community Connection team members, present at the luncheon, were recognized and acknowledged.

In conclusion of the luncheon, Betty Jo Hardy, of the Covenant Community Connection (CCC), offered an open invitation to attend “Let’s Get Connected Day”, a community event to be held May 20th at the Salisbury City Park. Hardy explained that the CCC is committed to being a multicultural voice, helping to foster unity and harmony by demonstrating compassion and caring for one another and understanding and appreciating differences, while confirming that everyone has value and worth. Salisbury City Councilman William “Pete” Kennedy offered the closing prayer of the luncheon.

The Mayor’s Spirit Luncheon is sponsored by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, Inc. and the Covenant Community Connection, a subcommittee of the Salisbury-Rowan Human Relations Council. For more information on the ongoing efforts of Project SAFE Salisbury, please contact Project SAFE Salisbury Resource Coordinator Teresa Vinson at 704-638-2175. For more information, regarding local government events, visit the City of Salisbury’s website at www.salisburync.gov or view Government Channel ACCESS